

Structures on the Old National Trail
Arch Culvert near St. Clairsville
Belmont County
Ohio

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THE OLD NATIONAL TRAIL

In 1933 many bridges and a few toll houses still existed along the OLD NATIONAL TRAIL between Baltimore, Maryland and Zanesville, Ohio. Modern road construction was gradually eliminating some of the old bridges and other landmarks of the period, and for that reason, a photographic trip was made during November and December of 1933 to record examples which were still preserved.

We are told that the National Trail was originally a buffalo track across the Appalachian Mountains, and because of its excellent location and ease of traveling, the Indians later made it one of their major East-West trails. Still later, when white men began to build roads, the trail was used as one of the first East-West highways in the country. The buffalo had established a route which neither the Indians nor the White Man wanted to improve.

The road was finished from Baltimore to Wheeling, West Virginia in 1812, then later, in 1826 it was finished to Zanesville, Ohio. Crossing the rivers and streams in the flat country of Ohio seemed to be quite a problem. The engineers either could not or would not cross the streams at an angle, and therefore, all of the arches were at right angles to the line of the streams. This gave the approaches to the bridges, in many instances, a sharp curve. When both approaches were curved in opposite directions, then a masonry letter "S" was formed, and so often was this done that these bridges became famous as the 'Ohio "S" Bridges.

Albert S. Burns

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